

**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE****Form Approved**  
**OMB No. 0704-0188**

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Washington Headquarters Service, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.

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<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 04-28-2011		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Master of Military Studies Research Paper		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b> September 2010 - April 2011	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Projecting Naval Forces Ashore: Justification in Today's Fiscally Constrained Environment				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b> N/A	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b> N/A	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b> N/A	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Bignell, Chad T., Major USMC				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b> N/A	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b> N/A	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b> N/A	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b> N/A	
<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b> N/A	
				<b>11. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b> N/A	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Unlimited					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> N/A					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> China's military modernization efforts and its desire for increased influence in the Western Pacific combined with hybrid threats like Iran require the United States to maintain a robust ability to conduct amphibious operations and project naval power ashore, even in a fiscally constrained environment. The advancement and proliferation of anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities require an amphibious force to neutralize their effects while operating within their range. The United States must continue to develop capabilities to counter the growing A2/AD threat in order to allow an amphibious assault force to maneuver with striking distance.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b>					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 27	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b> Marine Corps University / Command and Staff College
<b>a. REPORT</b> Unclass	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> Unclass	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> Unclass			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)</b> (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

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Command and Staff College  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**

Projecting Naval Forces Ashore: Justification in Today's Fiscally Constrained Environment

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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## **PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My desire to research this topic stems from my first 12 years as a Marine Corps officer and having served entirely from land bases. My experience is not unique in today's Marine Corps. For over nine years, this country has been engaged in what amounts to land warfare with no immediate need for a force capable of projecting naval power ashore. While working in operational units, I never put much consideration into this fact. However, my time at Marine Corps Command and Staff College along with recent comments from public officials, questioning the feasibility of amphibious assault, has sparked my interest in justifying the need for an amphibious force. In this paper, I intend to build, for myself, a better understanding of the amphibious environment and answer the question of whether or not amphibious assault is still a required capability.

With great appreciation, I bountifully received, from several individuals, assistance on this research in the form of time and guidance. For this mentorship, I am extremely grateful.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** Projecting Naval Forces Ashore: Justification in Today's Fiscally Constrained Environment

**Thesis:** The United States, more specifically the Marine Corps, must procure new equipment and develop doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures in order to ensure amphibious assaults can be conducted in today's environment and into the future. China's military modernization efforts and its desire for increased influence in the Western Pacific combined with hybrid threats like Iran require the United States to maintain a robust ability to conduct amphibious operations and project naval power ashore, even in a fiscally constrained environment.

**Discussion:** The focus of this paper is projecting naval power ashore. Amphibious assault operations cannot independently contain China, Iran, or any other country. While other military capabilities and the remaining instruments of national power, diplomacy, information, and economics, are fundamental in ensuring the security of the United States' vital interest, they do not fall within the scope of this work. As budgetary concerns mount and states increase their anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, the ability to project naval power ashore comes into question. Today's threat environment consists of China on one end with its military modernization efforts and desire to expand its sphere of influence, and multiple smaller countries on the other end like Iran with significant A2/AD capabilities. Although these capabilities present obstacles to gaining a lodgment, the United States should not allow its capability to conduct amphibious assaults to atrophy. Doing so will limit the options by which to gain a lodgment, decrease maneuver space, and will present the opposing force with fewer options to defend against. The United States must maintain a modular force capable of conducting amphibious assault operations from the company to the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) level, continue to develop technologies to facilitate operating within range of A2/AD weapons, and increase situational awareness of small unit leaders allowing them to conduct operations normally performed by larger units.

**Conclusion:** The ability for the United States to conduct amphibious assault operations thereby projecting naval power ashore today and in the foreseeable future remains vital to the military instrument of national power. Amphibious assault operations and the threat of such operations would play a major role in a large scale conflict with China's modernized military and potentially with smaller countries such as Iran who possess significant A2/AD capability. By not properly funding an amphibious force, one of only three sources of joint forcible entry, one limits maneuver space and options available in addition to allowing the enemy to more precisely employ assets. Even in today's fiscally conscious environment, with increased enemy capabilities in A2/AD weapons, a robust amphibious assault force remains an integral part of the United States' power projection ability.

## Introduction

Pete Ellis's 1921 production of the *Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia* document expanded the focus of the United States Marine Corps from "the defense of advanced bases in support of the fleet"<sup>1</sup> to amphibious assault operations to secure advanced bases. Ever since, the Marine Corps has maintained amphibious assault, also termed "forcible entry from the sea", as a core competency: *Marine Corps Vision & Strategy 2025*, as late as 2010, names forcible entry from the sea an enduring core competency.<sup>2</sup> Amphibious assaults played a pivotal role in the Pacific and European theaters during World War II. Much has changed since the last large scale amphibious assault conducted at Inchon during the Korean War. Changes in the threat environment have brought into question the relevancy of amphibious operations. Some of these environmental factors include anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, absence of peer competitors, and the proliferation of non-state actors.

Joint Publication 1-02 defines power projection as "the ability of a nation to apply all or some of its elements of national power - political, economic, informational, or military - to rapidly and effectively deploy and sustain forces in and from multiple dispersed locations to respond to crises, to contribute to deterrence, and to enhance regional stability."<sup>3</sup> An amphibious operation, particularly the amphibious assault, is one way for the United States to project power. Given today's fiscally conscious economic climate and the increased capabilities of A2/AD weapons, some would argue that maintaining a robust amphibious assault force is not necessary. This is a dangerous point of view. By not maintaining a robust amphibious assault force, the nation's ability to project power as defined above becomes limited. The United States, more specifically the Marine Corps, must procure new equipment and develop doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures in order to ensure amphibious assaults can be conducted in today's



environment and into the future. China's military modernization efforts and its desire for increased influence in the Western Pacific combined with hybrid threats like Iran require the United States to maintain a robust ability to conduct amphibious operations and project naval power ashore, even in a fiscally constrained environment.

This paper will first explore the current global threats. China is examined as an ascending countervailing power threatening the interests of the United States in the Western Pacific. Further, as China's sphere of influence increases, the threat to the United States' interest in the Western Pacific increases. Iran will be discussed as a hybrid threat, defined as a threat presenting a combination of conventional and unconventional methods and weapons. Next, the validity of projecting naval power ashore (i.e. amphibious assault) as it relates to joint forcible entry will be investigated. The cost of maintaining a force capable of projecting naval power ashore is, especially in today's fiscally constrained environment, a growing concern. In consideration of the current fiscal environment, however, is it in the United States' best interest to risk the military's ability to effectively conduct all types of amphibious operations by not allocating resources to amphibious equipment? The final topic for discussion is the United States' projection of naval power ashore and which types of equipment are required.

### **Today's Security Environment**

The Soviet Union was the closest peer competitor to the United States, during the Cold War. It was also the only country capable of threatening the survival of the United States. Thus, the United States' instruments of national power, specifically the military, were relatively well focused. Korea and Vietnam were the two major conflicts during this period. The aim of both conflicts was to prevent the spread of communism. Today's environment is different in that irregular forces are the prominent threat to the national security of the United States than do

conventional forces. Large terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda have grown in strength and have achieved greater access to more sophisticated weapons. China, as an ascending power with conflicting interest to those of the United States, poses the most dangerous threat. Iran exists between the non-state actors and China and presents a hybrid threat.

China is the most formidable conventional threat to the United States. Of late, China has been concentrating on bettering its A2/AD capabilities. To accomplish this increase in capability, China has in the last 20 years pursued a military modernization effort. "China's most formidable naval weapon systems"<sup>4</sup> its anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM) and anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM) are of main concern for naval and amphibious forces. Table 1 (see Appendix A) summarizes some of the anti-ship missiles China maintains. China is currently developing a new ASBM, the DF-21D, with a range of 1,500km (930 miles). The long range of the newer missile necessitates the United States' military maintain an increased standoff distance from coastlines where such ASBMs are assessed to be located. Complicating the problem is the maneuvering capability of the DF-21D, which makes the task of countering the missile after launch more difficult. In addition to the anti-ship missiles, China has, over the last 12 years, purchased three Soviet aircraft carriers. Currently renovations continue on the Varyag, one of the purchased Soviet aircraft carriers. Even though none of the carriers are operational, it can be concluded China has used them as learning tools, especially when one considers their desire to domestically build an aircraft carrier.<sup>5</sup>

According to China's 2008 White Paper concerning national defense, "China pursues a national defense policy which is purely defensive in nature."<sup>6</sup> The defensive policy set forth by the Chinese does not suggest they will wait for an opponent to conduct a military strike before conducting offensive operations. This means if China views actions by other states as infringing

on its sovereignty or areas of perceived vital security importance, China may conduct a preemptive strike. If China's views matched that of the United States', this issue would be irrelevant. However, China's views of what comprises its territory do not match that of the United States. For example, potential conflict exists when examining the "two island chains". Since World War II, China has predominately been restricted to operating inside the first island chain running from Japan south to Taiwan and then to the Philippines. The United States has kept this area unobstructed and allowed the free flow of Asian commerce. China is aware that at any point, the U.S. could prohibit such activities in this area. China is further aware that if the United States controls the first island chain, it is also able to move naval and land based forces to within striking range of China.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, Beijing established an exclusive economic zone from China's shoreline out to 200 miles.<sup>8</sup> China maintains that U.S. naval vessels should not be allowed to conduct operations in this area. The United States holds a very different view of this area and as Secretary of Defense Gates stated it is "impossible to compromise"<sup>9</sup> on this topic. Since the EP-3 incident in 2001 the United States has experienced increasing difficulty operating within this zone. Most recently, tension arose when Chinese aircraft and ships displayed aggressive behavior in March 2009.<sup>10</sup> Potential conflict with the United States will be ever present so long as China continues to assert itself in an effort to increase influence in the region.

China's chief concern, however, is Taiwan, which it views as Chinese territory.<sup>11</sup> The Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) has been massing "SRBMs, enhanced amphibious warfare capabilities, and modern, advanced long-range anti-air systems across the Strait from Taiwan."<sup>12</sup> The aggressive positioning of these forces provides China with the capability of crossing the

Taiwan Strait should Taiwan pursue *de jure* independence. Additionally, this positioning of forces provides a layer to the A2/AD strategy.

The Chinese have had the opportunity to observe the manner in which the United States and coalition forces built up combat power prior to Operations Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom, and Enduring Freedom. The Chinese will not willingly allow opposing forces to build up in the areas surrounding China. As such, China will consider any buildup of forces as provocation, similar to a “first firing.”<sup>13</sup>

The actions of the PLA have seemingly taken the civilian leadership in China by surprise several times revealing a possible breakdown in communication between the two. For example, President Hu of China was unaware of the flight of a stealth aircraft during Secretary Gates’ visit to China in January 2011. Two other events were the “2007 anti-satellite missile test and a 2009 confrontation between Chinese vessels and a U.S. surveillance ship.”<sup>14</sup> These events raised concerns among policy makers in the United States with regards to who maintains control of military forces. China’s intent is unclear and disjointed when the PLA conducts operations without the knowledge of the civilian leadership.

As an example of what could happen, look at the fishing boat incident between Japan and China from September 2010. A Chinese fishing boat collided with two Japanese Coast Guard boats near the contested Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands. Japan arrested the captain of the fishing boat and China was outraged when his detention was extended 10 days.<sup>15</sup> Hypothetically, what would happen if the PLA decided to conduct rescue operations to free the captain from Japanese detention and wrest control of the disputed island from Japan? The United States would then, bound by the *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security*, be required to aid Japan. If escalations continue the United States could find itself in a situation similar to that of the World War II

*island hopping* campaign. In this instance, an amphibious assault would be a critical capability worthy of possession.

Some argue that conflict with China is highly unlikely due to China's economic ties with the world, the United States in particular, and its current inability to project and sustain large forces significant distances. While that might be true, especially in the near term, if China is left unchecked and allowed to extend its area of influence, at what point is China going to be satisfied? Once China is unopposed within the economic zone will it be satisfied or will a more expansive economic zone be pursued? Perhaps China extends the economic zone to 400 miles, which would then include Okinawa. China will continue to pursue increased influence if left unchecked by an outside force. History is full of examples of such behavior. Using the United States as a recent example, it becomes evident that a state will feverishly seek a larger sphere of influence if left unopposed. The United States is currently the sole global super power and exerts more influence throughout the world than any other state. United States global presence and active foreign policy attempt to shape the political landscape in order to further its national interests. It is evident that the United States remains unsatisfied with the amount of power and influence it maintains. If left unobstructed, China, like the United States, will continue in its quest for greater power and influence. It is in the national interest of the United States not to allow China to expand to the detriment of U.S. vital interests. Any action that results in decreasing the capabilities of the United States, particularly capabilities that decrease the ability to operate within the first island chain, could be viewed by China as capitulation and will likely serve to expedite the expansion of its influence. Lacking an amphibious assault force limits the military options available to the United States in the Western Pacific, which will result in allowing China to increase its influence in the region while decreasing U.S. influence.

Where China poses a conventional threat to U.S. security interests in East Asia, Iran presents a hybrid threat. Even more worrisome is Iran's willingness to supply known terrorist organizations with weapons. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) focuses on "protect[ing] itself from foreign, primarily U.S., interference or attack, and to exert regional influence."<sup>16</sup> To accomplish this, Iran currently maintains a large stock pile of anti-ship missiles, with ranges from 95-100km for the HY-3 up to 120km for the C-802. These missiles are mobile and fired from either the shoreline or a ship. The mobility of these systems makes exact locations and subsequent destruction of the systems difficult. Mines form another layer of the defense. The Iranians maintain a "fast mine-laying platform"<sup>17</sup> allowing them to place "smart" and "dumb" free floating mines. Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) monitor the passive defenses, while a fleet of patrol boats place an active element into the defense. The boats are able to employ the C-802 anti-ship missile, thus, extending the range at which Iran can engage ships.<sup>18</sup> Even though Iran's military is extensive, "they are widely considered relatively combat ineffective in a head-on confrontation against a well trained, sophisticated military."<sup>19</sup>

Iran's nuclear program adds to the instability in the region. Because of the difficulty in verifying the status of Iran's nuclear program, it cannot be concluded, with certainty, whether or not Iran is developing a nuclear weapon. Due to Iran's unwillingness to fully comply and be forthright with the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is logical to assume Iran does seek a nuclear weapon capability. A nuclear Iran has huge implications for the region. There is an existing possibility that Iran could use the threat of a nuclear attack as a terror weapon against neighboring states. The focus of the threat could range from controlling oil policies, eliminating support for the United States, and even to the destruction of Israel. If and when Iran acquires a nuclear weapon, the United States will be forced to respond. Depending on how Iran utilizes the

nuclear capability, an amphibious assault would prove to be a valuable means, complementary to the other joint forcible entry methods, to gain a lodgment.

Another key component to the Iran puzzle is their chemical and biological weapons. Iran is currently pursuing a chemical weapons infrastructure and “‘may have already’ stockpiled blister, blood, choking, and nerve agents.”<sup>20</sup> Combine the previous fact with the fact that Iran has the “‘largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the Middle East,’”<sup>21</sup> and the Middle East has another destabilizing weapon controlled by an unpredictable/rogue state. Worsening the situation is Iran’s support of terrorist organizations. If Iran continues to see their support of terrorist organizations as advantageous, it will carry on this supportive action further destabilizing the region.

Many of Iran’s neighbors are leery of Iran’s influence in the region. With each acquired capability and irresponsible action, anxiety in the region further increases. Even though most states in the Middle East are very concerned with the situation, none are willing to overtly support U.S. led actions against Iran because of possible retaliation.<sup>22</sup> Notably, Syria is Iran’s closest ally in the region. The basis for this relationship is the mutual dislike for Israel. Further, Syria allows weapons to transit from Iran to their common support organizations, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other Palestinian terrorist groups. It is primarily the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Qods force that provides weapons, training, and funding to the aforementioned groups.<sup>23</sup>

On February 20, 2009 statements were made by Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, an advisor to Iran’s supreme leader, “‘that Bahrain was at one time an Iranian province.”<sup>24</sup> This stance when taken a step further would result in Iran attempting to take control of Bahrain. With nuclear weapons and a Syrian ally, Iran’s neighbors may think twice before intervening in a conflict

between Iran and Bahrain. Iran, feeling emboldened, would be more likely to reclaim Bahrain as a territory. Due to the Middle Eastern States' reluctance to oppose Iran, the United States could be required to address the situation unilaterally. Because Bahrain is an island state in the Persian Gulf between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, options for a unilateral operation to liberate Bahrain are limited. An amphibious assault would be one of the very few methods of freeing Bahrain from Iranian occupation. Complicating the equation even more is Iran's position along the Strait of Hormuz. With adequate A2/AD capabilities, Iran would be able to close the one and only maritime approach into the Persian Gulf. In order for an amphibious assault to operate in this situation it would need to possess the ability to effectively nullify a substantial A2/AD threat.

The threats discussed above are representative of an emerging power competing with the United States for regional influence and of a state, possibly with nuclear weapons, who is threatening to its neighbors. China's capabilities are well ahead of those Iran possesses and improving upon each day. As China seeks to increase its influence to the first and second island chains, the threat it poses to the national interests of the United States in the Western Pacific will increase. As a result the United States should not discount China as a threat. Should the United States discount China and not allocate resources for developing equipment to counter future Chinese capabilities, the ability to decisively engage China's forces will be lost. Potential conflicts with China would likely be rooted in territorial disputes, such as Taiwan and the disputed waters in the South China Sea. Though Iran's conventional military capabilities are not as robust as China's, the threat Iran poses is worth the discussion. Iran's weapon capabilities are great and if the IRGC is presented with an opposing military force like the United States, its weapons (chemical, biological, and any foreseeable nuclear) will be employed in an unconventional and irresponsible way. A conflict with Iran would come from a relatively slow



escalation of an issue, possibly the continued pursuance of a nuclear weapon. In regards to amphibious assault, the best approach is to resource a force for the most capable and dangerous threat. The force should not be restricted to conducting only large scale operations as the most likely conflicts are of smaller scale. This will lead to a module force capable of conducting distributed operations at the proportional size relative to the situation.

### **Forcible Entry**

According to Joint Publication 3-18, “‘Forcible entry’ is a joint military operation conducted against armed opposition to gain entry into the territory of an adversary by seizing a lodgment as rapidly as possible in order to enable the conduct of follow-on operations or conduct a singular operation.”<sup>25</sup> Amphibious assault is but one method to conduct joint forcible entry, a method to which the Marine Corps is committed. However, several issues arise when scrutinizing the need for an amphibious assault capability.

The first issue to address is the equipment cost. The last two programs the Marine Corps pursued in an effort to improve amphibious capabilities and ability to project power ashore, the MV-22 Osprey and the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV), went well over both timeline and budget. For example, if Congress does not cancel the EFV, which began in 1988, it is estimated that the program will cost over \$11 billion consuming “up to 90% of the Marines’ ground equipment budget.”<sup>26</sup> Add to this cost the expense of maintaining 33 amphibious ships and all the landing craft required to conduct a large scale landing, and the price of sustaining an amphibious force becomes substantial. In today’s shrinking military budget, it seems logical to conduct operations in the most economic manner possible. From a cost perspective, regarding the current land based conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan with unquestionable air superiority, focusing on equipment designed to operate solely on land makes sense. That being said, this

approach will create a more narrowly focused and less flexible force that may not serve the country well in future conflicts.

Utility is a second factor to examine. The United States has historically used other countries to build up and insert forces. For example, Saudi Arabia was used as a staging area prior to Operation Desert Storm and again prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom. States bordering conflict zones have historically granted the United States territorial access. To assume similar access in the future is a huge risk. Political pressure will weigh heavily and depending on the situation, neighboring countries may be unwilling to give the United States a staging area. Turkey's refusal to allow the United States use of its territory during Operation Iraqi Freedom is a prime example. Strategic planners must remain mindful that countries bordering a conflict will not always willingly grant access to their territory. Additionally, especially in the case of China, the opposing force may not allow the buildup of forces in neighboring countries. In such instances amphibious assault could be the only option.

Long range bombing provides another means other than projecting naval power to strike the enemy. Precision guided munitions have the ability to strike key targets leaving a gap large enough to insert forces with air power. To accomplish this task, more than likely foreign support in the form of airspace is required. Thus, the reliance on foreign and possibly neutral countries still exists. The United States in either case could disregard the desires of the countries in question by violating their airspace. However, consequences would result following obvious disregard for a state's sovereignty. It is unlikely that the United States would encounter a situation where no state would allow them, at a minimum, the use of airspace. Though an unlikely situation for the United States, it is not outside the realm of possibility. In this instance, a forcible entry from the sea operation is a key capability the United States requires for power

projection. Additionally, relying solely on long range bombing and air insertion, and not using the sea as maneuver space, only simplifies the situation for the enemy. Using airpower's capabilities of bombing and insertion in concert with the amphibious forces' ability to assault from the sea puts the enemy in a dilemma. If the enemy chooses to guard against airpower it becomes vulnerable to an amphibious assault, and vice versa. This situation forces the enemy to either defend more effectively against one of the two capabilities or less effectively against both.

Secretary Gates is likely correct in questioning the feasibility of "large-scale amphibious assault landings along the lines of Inchon."<sup>27</sup> Many implications exist if large-scale landings are deemed not feasible; thus, determining the capability to conduct amphibious assaults is no longer needed. Joint Publications 3-02 lists amphibious assault as one of five types of amphibious operations. The other four types are amphibious raids, demonstrations, withdrawals, and amphibious support to other operations.<sup>28</sup> These other types of amphibious operations have proven necessary in the past. In fact, General Schwarzkopf ordered an amphibious demonstration during Operation Desert Storm.<sup>29</sup> Conducting the demonstration caused the Iraqi military to focus attention toward the coast line allowing the United States Army's VII Corps and XVIII Airborne Corps to maneuver to the west and attack from an unanticipated position. Operation Eagle Claw included a long range amphibious raid to rescue hostages held in Iran. Even in its failure, the operation's ability to project naval power ashore demonstrated the usefulness of the amphibious raid capability. Following the earthquake in Haiti on 12 January 2010, the 22nd MEU provided support in the form of moving food, water, and supplies into and around Haiti. The amphibious assault capability is linked to four other capabilities. Giving up the amphibious assault capability does not mean the resources freed from that capability can go elsewhere; the other four capabilities and resource requirements remain.

Giving up the amphibious assault capability also means giving up valuable maneuver space. This means that the enemy has one less possible course of action to consider, allowing him to more precisely place his defenses. An article in July 2009's *Marine Corps Gazette* makes this point by using a chess strategy, "the move not played" as an analogy.<sup>30</sup> In this analogy one is forcing his/her opponent to consider all threats on the board. When one side reduces the number of threats (amphibious assault), the other side has fewer courses of action to consider. Since the enemy can better defend against fewer threats, his opponent will have a more difficult time conducting the chosen course of action. The Operation Desert Storm example mentioned above demonstrates this logic. Take the Marines out of the Persian Gulf and Iraq can suddenly concentrate solely on the forces in Saudi Arabia. This would make the wheel movement of the XVIII Airborne Corps and VII Corps much more difficult.

Amphibious assault remains a vital capability of joint forcible entry. Maintaining this skill set is a costly endeavor. In spite of the cost, maintaining amphibious assault ensures the maintenance of the other four types of amphibious operations. There are two other types of forcible entry operations: airborne assault and air assault. Both of these operations will likely require a third state to allow territorial access for either the buildup or deployment of forces. In most instances, amphibious assault is the only forcible entry operation not dependent on a third state. Consequently, the United States' ability to project power relies heavily on its ability to quickly move troops to the area in question. Amphibious assault, in turn, is a requirement to ensure troops can be employed at a moment's notice.

### **Projecting Naval Power Ashore**

The Marine Corps maintains a modular and scalable force. The Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) can be sized appropriately to operate across the range of military operations. Its

capabilities can be tailored for operations requiring more aviation assets or operations requiring more ground assets. This type of organizational setup is well equipped to optimize the size and makeup of its forces for each conflict. The Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) is capable of amphibious assault while the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) has only a limited capability of such operations.<sup>31</sup> Given the likelihood that future conflicts, at least in the near to mid-term, are to be of limited scale, the MEU should be capable of amphibious assault, although at a far lesser scale than that of a MEF. Forcible entry operations, of which amphibious assault is one type, seek to seize "a lodgment as rapidly as possible in order to enable the conduct of follow-on operations or conduct a singular operation."<sup>32</sup> If all that is required is for a lodgment to be established and maintained long enough for the buildup of follow on forces, a MEU could achieve the objective against limited enemy forces within the MEUs ability to defeat. The unrest in Tunisia during January 2011 would be a situation where the MEU could conduct an amphibious assault. During the unrest President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali resigned and fled to Saudi Arabia. The resignation was followed by the designation of two presidents in two days. Had the United States deemed the instability in Tunisia a threat to national security, worthy of troop deployment, a MEU would be able to gain and maintain a lodgment for follow on forces.

The Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2010 exercise took a step toward proving the ability of smaller units to conduct complex operations that in the past were left to larger forces. A company landing team (CLT) was used to conduct sustained operations ashore. The first platoon, once inserted, seized a littoral objective and was followed by an artillery platoon that set up firing positions to support two other platoons 50 kilometers to the northwest. The platoons in the northwest were conducting counterinsurgency operations.<sup>33</sup> The Marine Corps'

decentralized command and control system is a key enabler in scenarios like this. MCDP 6 states "our approach should be based on mission command and control."<sup>34</sup>

Utilizing this approach, the company is given a mission stating what the goals are as opposed to specific "how to" directives. The company commander provides his units missions in the same manner. This approach allows the commanders closest to the scenario, with the knowledge of what the mission is intended to accomplish, to make the best and quickest decision. The weapon of tempo is not only maintained, but it is also increased, allowing small units to outpace large forces. While this example is of a CLT, it is one of a smaller unit conducting amphibious operations that previously required a larger one.

Another enabler in the experiment was the use of advanced communications equipment. The new capability bettered voice and data communications and position reports. The result was "leaders down to the squad level benefited from solid voice and data communications and timely, accurate position-locations information."<sup>35</sup> There is no doubt all leaders involved enjoyed unprecedented situational awareness. As promising as this capability is, it cannot be allowed to become a critical vulnerability. Opposing forces, China in particular, are bettering their capabilities daily, in efforts to disrupt communication systems. In fact, in January 2007 China displayed the capability to destroy satellites in orbit,<sup>36</sup> a key piece of the aforementioned communications system. The security of this capability requires attention. Satellite defense must be able to counter anti-satellite missiles and defend against cyber attacks attempting to corrupt the intended satellite properties. It is imperative that terrestrial equipment be able to negate any attempts at corrupting or intercepting information as it is sent through the airwaves. While this new era of communication has vulnerabilities, it does allow the United States to conduct high tempo operations with smaller forces. The amphibious assault force, and all forces

for that matter, can mitigate the effect of losing this advanced communications equipment by fostering initiative in small unit leaders and using a mission command and control system.

As MCDP 3 illustrates, one of the objectives of using the sea for maneuver space “is to use the mobility provided by naval power to avoid enemy strengths and strike where the enemy is weak.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, an ideal goal of an amphibious assault is to maneuver to a position where the landing force is able to disembark the ships and land on an unopposed beach, taking the enemy completely by surprise. The amphibious assault at Inchon during the Korean War is an example of using the sea as maneuver space and assaulting an unsuspecting enemy. The X Corps was able to land at Inchon against lightly prepared and uncoordinated defenses. The goal of conducting an unopposed amphibious assault becomes more attainable with non-state players. Since this goal generally can’t be accomplished, not getting bogged down in the engagement areas and moving to the lodgment area as quickly as possible is the primary concern. With the proliferation and increase in capabilities of A2/AD weapons, the engagement area is growing deeper, extending further from shore, and wider, covering more shoreline.

Destruction of A2/AD weapons is one way to allow an amphibious assault force access to a hostile coast line. Because of the difficulties of locating, targeting, servicing, and verifying destruction, the safety of the force cannot be guaranteed. However, standoff distance can assure A2/AD weapons will not be capable of striking an amphibious fleet. By not maintaining sufficient standoff distance and operating within the range of A2/AD weapons the amphibious force will be at risk. The threat rings span at least 75 miles. The capabilities of this threat were proven when Hezbollah struck an Israeli ship with what is believed to be a C-802 cruise missile in 2006.<sup>38</sup> To remain outside this range requires amphibious ships to remain a minimum of 75 miles from the shore. The increase in range of anti-ship missiles is happening faster than the

corresponding increase in range of vehicles capable of ship-to-shore movement. For instance, examine the expeditionary fighting vehicle (EFV) program. Initiated in 1988, the EFV had a range objective of 25 miles. At the time, due to limitations in target acquisition from over the horizon, 25 miles was sufficient distance to be out of the range of anti-ship missiles. Today, the Secretary of Defense has recommended cancellation of the EFV program, while anti-ship missile range has increased to 75 miles or better.

Two solutions to the anti-ship missile problem exist. The first is an increased capability to destroy the missile either prior to or after launch. The Pentagon's Ballistic Missile Defense Organization is developing technology to employ UAVs to detect theater ballistic missiles and launch interceptor missiles. An amphibious force could use this capability to form a screen, allowing it to get closer to the shoreline. The second solution is to continue to develop a vehicle, similar to the EFV, able to conduct ship-to-shore movements at extended range. This solution has proven difficult to accomplish. Airlifting troops into the area has potential, but once inserted, troops lack assault vehicles like the AAV. The need for an assault vehicle capable of conducting long range ship-to-shore movements still exists. A combination of the two solutions above will help reduce the impact of anti-ship missiles. Due to the fast paced increases in capabilities, it is not feasible to operate outside the growing threat ring of anti-ship ballistic and cruise missiles. The United States must continue to find solutions, material and procedural, to neutralize the impact these missiles have on its ability to conduct amphibious operations.

Addressing the anti-ship missile threat and projecting naval power ashore is something the Navy and Marine Corps must collaborate on and train toward. The landlocked conflicts of the last 10 years in Iraq and Afghanistan have preoccupied both services, but primarily the Marine Corps. This has limited the training opportunities and degraded the two services' ability



to come together and execute an amphibious assault. In order to regain and increase proficiency in amphibious assault operations, the Navy and Marine Corps team must add emphasis to training exercises like Bold Alligator. Bold Alligator 2011 was the first of many planned exercises in which the Navy and Marine Corps conducted a "joint fleet synthetic amphibious exercise."<sup>39</sup> Exercises like Bold Alligator and RIMPAC should continue with added emphasis in refining amphibious doctrine, identifying shortfalls in amphibious equipment, and improving coordination between the two services.

The MAGTF provides a modular model to build a force with. It can be tailored to operate across the range of military operations. The doctrine should, however, be adjusted to recognize present day realities. It should be clearly and emphatically articulated in doctrine that the MEU is capable of conducting amphibious assault operations. Mission command and control, and improved communications capability give the smaller units the tools to conduct larger missions. The experiment during RIMPAC 2010 provided an example of the same (in this case a company conducting what doctrinally required a battalion). For a Marine force of any size to conduct amphibious assaults, the United States must continue to seek improvements in the ability to neutralize the A2/AD threat, specifically anti-ship missiles. Forces must be capable of conducting operations from inside the growing threat rings by preventing the launching of the missiles or intercepting the missiles. Additionally, a more capable amphibious assault vehicle or system must be developed to quickly and from great distance transport a combat vehicle ashore.

## **Conclusion**

In order to ensure the security of the nation, the United States must invest in and develop new technologies to enhance key capabilities in order to cope with the changing security environment. Over the last 20 years, the United States has enjoyed the role of sole superpower;

however, this status is at risk. China's military modernization efforts are quickly increasing its capabilities and closing the gap between it and the United States. Because China is seeking more influence in the Western Pacific where the United States has historically been the dominate influence the potential for conflict between the two states is increasing. With China's increased capabilities and interest in participation on the global stage in combination with opposing views to those of the United States, China poses the most dangerous threat to the security interests of the United States in Asia and the Western Pacific. However, conflict with smaller, less stable countries is far more likely than conflict with China. In this paper, Iran is used as an example, yet numerous states could be substituted. Syria, for instance, while currently not as vocal, is in much the same position as Iran. These types of countries pose numerous threats. For instance, when confronted by an overwhelming military force they are likely to resort to unconventional warfare using guerrilla tactics. Iran having chemical, biological, and possibly nuclear weapons further complicates its resorting to unconventional warfare tactics. Using such tactics while employing relatively modern weapons, Iran is capable of presenting a formidable opposition in the event of a conflict with the United States.

The United States must be able to ensure its security in a wide range of environments—from humanitarian/disaster relief operations, to medium intensity conflict, to all out unlimited war. In Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom land warfare proved prominent, with operations at sea and in the air playing a supporting role. Other than Task Force 58's aerial movement ashore, the United States' ability to project naval forces ashore in a combat environment was unexercised. It is unwise to develop a military strategy based on these two conflicts, as the environment will not always be so one sided toward the present day land component. According to the Strategic Vision Group "as much as 75% of the world's population

will live within 40 miles of coasts by 2035.”<sup>40</sup> The likelihood of conflicts arising in littoral regions is high, and the United States must be capable of projecting naval power ashore in such conflicts.

In order to project naval power ashore, the United States must be able to effectively counter the increase in A2/AD capabilities as well as operate within range of A2/AD weapons. Investment in long range bombardment, at the expense of investment in projecting naval power ashore, will cause the latter capability to atrophy and limit power projection options. By limiting the available options, the enemy is permitted to focus on fewer options. Thus, the enemy will be able to counter any chosen action more effectively. Applying a combined arms mindset to the idea, the United States engages a force namely by air, land, and sea. If the opposing force concentrates on defeating the air, it then becomes susceptible to the land and sea. By willfully eliminating the sea option, simply because of cost, the enemy only has to be concerned with the air and land components. Another result of losing the ability to project naval power ashore is the decreased influence of the United States and the increased influence of the opposing force. If the United States is willing to accept less influence it must also be willing to accept that another state will fill the influence vacuum. The result will be the loss of the prominent position the United States currently enjoys and possibly the loss of the ability to control its own destiny. This is not a position most Americans are willing to take.

One must remember that the ability to project naval power ashore is but one piece of the military calculus. The pursuit of one capability has an effect on and comes at the expense of another capability. Projection of naval power ashore must weigh in relation to long range bombardment, ground warfare, and other critical military capabilities. Amphibious equipment must be developed and procured in an economical way in order to achieve a balance with other

key capabilities. In the future, programs such as the Osprey and EFV need to be more budget conscious or contribute more to the military organization. Just as projecting naval power ashore is a subset of military power; military power is only part of national power and the government's ability to provide security to its citizens. If the government allotted all resources to the military, the government could guarantee security from external threats; but who would provide for the internal security of the nation? Who would govern the economic system and oversee its interactions in the world markets? In point, this is a balancing act, one that the military and projecting naval power ashore plays a fundamental part in.

The ability for the United States to conduct amphibious assaults and project naval power ashore today and in the foreseeable future remains vital to the military instrument of national power. Amphibious assaults and the threat of such operations would play a major role in a large scale conflict with China's modernized military as well as conflict with smaller countries such as Iran who possess significant A2/AD capability. By not properly funding an amphibious force, one of only three methods of joint forcible entry, one limits maneuver space and options available in addition to allowing the enemy to more precisely employ assets. Even in today's fiscally conscious environment with increased enemy capabilities in A2/AD weapons, a robust amphibious assault force is an integral part of the United States' power projection ability.

# Appendix A

## Chinese Anti-Ship Ballistic/Cruise Missiles

Designation	Range	Delivery Method
C-101 (HY-3)	50 km	Older Surface Ships
C-202 (HY-4) "Silkworm"	135 km	Air
C-301	100-200 km	Coast
C-601/C-611	25-100 km/ 200 km	Air
C-602	50-280 km	Coast, Surface
C-701	15 km	Air
C-802 (YJ-82) "Chinese Exocet"	45 km	Coast, Surface, Air, Submarine
SS-N-22 "Sunburn"	160 km	Surface
DF-21D (In development)	1,500 km	Coast

Table 1

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<sup>3</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JP 1-2 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 12, 2001 (amended through April 2010)), 367.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty—First Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 110.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2007*, Arlington, VA: Department of Defense, 2007, 25.

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<sup>9</sup> John Pomfret, "Regional Risks Make U.S.-Japan Ties Even More Key," *Washington Post*, January 14, 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/13/AR2011011307129.html?nav=rss\\_world/special/8](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/13/AR2011011307129.html?nav=rss_world/special/8) (accessed March 1, 2011).

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<sup>11</sup> Michael P. Laherty, "Red Wings Ascendant: The Chinese Air Force Contribution to Anti-access," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 60 (1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2011): 96-97.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2009*, Arlington, VA: Department of Defense, 2009, 42.

<sup>13</sup> Laherty, 96.

<sup>14</sup> David S. Cloud, "Gates Addresses China Issues," *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 2011, <http://ebird.osd.mil/ebird2/ebfiles/e20110114800147.html> (accessed March 1, 2011).

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<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Response*, CRS Report for Congress RL32048 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 22, 2010), 19.

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<sup>18</sup> Cordesman.

<sup>19</sup> Katzman, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Katzman, 35.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Director of National Intelligence. *Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, by Dennis Blair. Washington, DC: Director of National intelligence, February 2, 2010, <http://intelligence.senate.gov/100202/blair.pdf> (accessed March 1, 2011) 13.

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<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, by Daniel Benjamin. Washington, DC: Department of State, August 2010, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2009/140889.htm> (accessed March 1, 2011).

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<sup>30</sup> John Spang, "Justifying Amphibious Capability: From the move not played to the power sweep," *Marine Corps Gazette*, July, 2009, <http://www.mca-marines.org/gazette/article/justifying-amphibious-capability> (accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Operations*, MCDP 3 (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, April 16, 1998), 73, 76.

<sup>32</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Forcible Entry Operations*, JP 3-18 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 16, 2008), I-1.

<sup>33</sup> Vincent J. Goulding, "Use RIMPAC for Future Naval Force Development", Proceedings, November 2010, 68-70.

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<sup>37</sup> MCDP 3, 90.

<sup>38</sup> Yaakov Katz, "Navy ship redeploys following attack," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 6, 2006, <http://www.jpost.com/Home/Article.aspx?id=30757> (accessed March 1, 2011).

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